

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **RAPPAHANNOCK AREA HEALTH DISTRICT REMINDS RESIDENTS THAT EXTREME HEAT REQUIRES PROTECTIVE ACTIONS**

*Health Officials Urge Residents to Stay Cool, Stay Hydrated and Stay Informed*

**(Fredericksburg, Va.)**— As the first major heat wave of the season arrives, the health department reminds residents that extreme heat requires protective actions during the summer months. Summer temperatures in Virginia normally climb into the upper 90's and even reach over 100 degrees at times. The hot temperatures and high heat indexes can cause ill health effects. "We encourage all residents to take the necessary precautions to protect against heat-related illness" said District Health Director, Brooke Rossheim, MD, MPH.

Heat kills by pushing the human body beyond its limits. In extreme conditions, evaporation is slowed and the body must work extra hard to maintain a normal temperature. According to the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, in 2013 there were 5 heat-related deaths in Virginia, a relatively light year; in 2012 there were 21. Staying cool, hydrated and informed can save lives.



The people most at risk are the elderly, those who work or exercise outdoors, infants and children, low income individuals, and people with a chronic medical condition, especially if they are not in an air-conditioned environment. If you know someone in this situation, check on them to see how they are doing during periods of excessive heat.

One of the most important precautions people should take is to schedule or reschedule activities and outdoor work for the coolest parts of the day. In the summer, sunlight exposure is greatest between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Here are additional steps you can take to protect yourself against heat-related illnesses:

- Keep cool in an air-conditioned area. Take a cool shower or a bath. Consider a trip to the mall or a local library or visit a friend with air conditioning. Spending at least two hours per day in air conditioning significantly reduces the risk of heat-related illnesses. When temperatures reach the upper 90s or above, a fan may not prevent heat-related illness.
- Drink plenty of fluids (2-4 glasses of cool fluids each hour.) To replace salt and minerals lost from sweating, drink fruit juice or a sports beverage during exercise or when you have to work outside. However, talk to your doctor first if you're on a fluid-restricted diet or medications, or on a low-salt diet.
- Never leave children or pets alone in a car for **any** period of time, even with the air-conditioning on or the windows cracked. Temperatures inside a car can reach more than 150 degrees quickly, resulting in heat stroke and death.

- Avoid sunburn and wear light clothing. Sunburn limits your body's ability to keep itself cool and causes loss of body fluids. Use sunscreen with a high SPF. Lighter-weight clothing that is loose fitting and light colored is more comfortable during extreme temperatures. Use a hat to keep the head cool.
- Use the "buddy system" if you're working outside. If you're working outside and suffer a heat-related illness, you could become confused or could lose consciousness. Therefore, make sure someone else knows of your plans.
- Learn the symptoms of heat-related illness:
  - Warning signs of heat exhaustion vary but may include: heavy sweating, paleness, muscle cramps, tiredness, weakness, dizziness, headache, nausea or vomiting, fainting, skin that is cool and moist, pulse rate that is fast and weak, and breathing that is fast and shallow.
    - If heat exhaustion is untreated, it may progress to heat stroke. Seek medical attention immediately if symptoms are severe or the victim has heart problems or high blood pressure. Otherwise, help the victim to cool off and seek medical attention if symptoms worsen or last longer than one hour.
  - Signs and symptoms of heat stroke may include a high body temperature (above 103°F), hot red, dry or moist skin, rapid and strong pulse and possible unconsciousness.
    - Heat stroke is a medical emergency. Summon emergency medical assistance immediately. Move the person to a cooler environment and reduce the person's body temperature with cool cloths or even a bath. Do **not** give fluids if heat stroke is suspected. Seek additional guidance from the 9-1-1 operator until help arrives.
- Stay informed by monitoring for heat-related notices issued by the National Weather Service.

For more information about heat-related illnesses, visit the Virginia Department of Health's website at [www.vdh.virginia.gov](http://www.vdh.virginia.gov).

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